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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

UNITED STATES SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, D.C., February 4, 1983.

Hon. CHARLES H. PERCY,
Chairman, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations,
U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: Since April 1982, I have looked into a number of non-broadcasting activities of the United States Information Agency in order to assess the usefulness of the tools and products available to USIA employees in the field. They include, among others, the (daily news) Wireless File, the speakers' program, the libraries, educational and cultural exchanges, and the computerized Distribution and Records System. I also have examined the circumstances and morale of foreign national employees of the Agency at overseas posts.

Transmitted herewith is my report on these activities.

SCOTT COHEN,
Executive Assistant to the Chairman.

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Introduction

It is a popular assumption in Washington that public diplomacy is important to U.S. national security. In fact, the United States Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, in its 1982 report, went so far as to say that "Public diplomacy is as indispensable to our national security as military preparedness, and the Commission urges that it be treated with the same urgency and concern."

In view of the importance attached to public diplomacy by the Commission, and by others, it is interesting to note that the Commission report began with a full-page exposition of typical public diplomacy projects and activities, apparently despairing of being able to define public diplomacy explicitly.

The report stated that "The International Communication Agency (since then renamed United States Information Agency) engages in public diplomacy "when the Voice of America . . . brings accurate news to millions of people . . . in Poland, when an American Fulbright scholar teaches economics in Honduras, when (Agency) representatives in Panama refute Soviet propaganda . . . when (Agency) representatives assist foreign journalists," etc.

The term "public diplomacy," while evading precise definition, does embrace the varied international informational and educational and cultural activities undertaken by the government to foster the best possible image of the United States and its people abroad and to achieve maximum foreign understanding and support for U.S. policies.

The success of the Agency mission in a foreign country depends to a great extent on the quality of the tools and products available to Agency employees in the field, how well they suit the local foreign environment, how effectively they are used by the Agency mission, and how creatively the members of the mission can go beyond the tools and products to make a positive impact on foreign officials, media, academics, businesspeople, and the general public.

In the course of my survey, I have interviewed Agency officials and employees in Washington, public affairs officers (chiefs of USIA missions overseas) on home leave or in Washington for consultation, and U.S. Ambassadors, political officers, Agency representatives of all levels and foreign national employees in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Athens, Budapest, Vienna, and London. The public affairs officers I interviewed in Washington had served in Brasilia, Rangoon, Bonn, and Manila.

The largest USIA missions are in India, West Germany, Japan, Brazil, Pakistan, Mexico, Yugoslavia, and Italy, in that order. The USIA is represented at 202 posts in 124 countries.

At the same time that USIA Brazil employs 27 Americans and 116 local employees, with largely independent binational centers in 70 Brazilian cities, USIA England employs only six Americans and 24 local employees and has no binational centers. This contrast of USIA

investment takes into account the vastly greater resources of U.S. information, education and culture available in the United Kingdom without U.S. Government encouragement and exemplifies the type of thinking which forms the basis for USIA decisions on mission size. Other factors may include the strategic importance of a host country, the tolerance of U.S. official activities, the public demand for USIA services and programs, and the cost effectiveness of USIA investments in one post as compared with another.

In recent years the missions have been cut in funds and personnel which some officers maintain has led to greater individual performance among remaining staff, while others say it has adversely affected the missions' outreach to influential members of the host nation's political, economic and media life. With only two American USIA officers in a city such as Jerusalem, or Munich, there is a serious limitation on what can be done at those posts on behalf of U.S. interests in areas of concern to USIA.

At the same time Agency officers broadly believe that USIA headquarters is grossly overstaffed. This perception dampens the morale of personnel in the field. But it is a perception also shared by many at headquarters.

Of the Agency's 8,597 employees, 3,637 are at headquarters, 280 elsewhere in the United States, and 893 Americans and 3,787 foreign nationals are overseas.

The trimmed-back missions abroad have in some cases compensated for personnel reductions by contracting out for the services of a driver or a janitor, a Wireless File operator, for packaging and mailing of materials, and so forth. The paperwork demands on smaller posts were so great that reporting requirements had to be reduced. But officers at small posts still complain that paperwork for headquarters still requires too much of their time at the expense of outreach activities.

On the other hand, a U.S. Ambassador made the complaint to me that USIA officers don't have enough local language capability to make all the contacts they should, and therefore their outreach is limited and they spend their time with those local officials, journalists and academics who are fluent in English. At ease in the local language himself, and a gregarious sort, he saw himself as a much more effective communicator of U.S. policy views than the USIA mission at his embassy. His complaint applies to USIA missions in other countries as well. But it is not generally the case, according to responses to my inquiries, and indeed there are Agency representatives who, while lacking strong local language capability, make up for this deficiency by extraordinary diligence and determination to get the job done. Still other USIA officers have managed to gain fluency in one, two or more languages.

As in every large organization there is the full range of quality and performance among the managers and employees. But, from what I have seen, USIA has its share of dedicated, hard-working, effective and creative people. Some of the public affairs officers are absolutely first rate and serve our country with great distinction. There seems to be an ample number of competent information officers and cultural officers working their way up to be the "next generation" of public affairs officers.

Media Work/Wireless File

A basic function of the USIA mission abroad is to promote and maintain a constructive relationship with the media. The mission's ability to do this effectively depends in part on the understanding and predilections of the U.S. Ambassador. At some posts the public affairs officer or the information officer actually serves as press secretary to the ambassador and the Embassy. When this situation obtains, there is usually excellent cooperation and coordination between the Embassy and the USIA mission. A good example is Tel Aviv where the information officer carries out the duties of press secretary and spokesman for Ambassador Sam Lewis who himself provides background briefings—arranged by USIA—for Israeli and American correspondents and for the editorial boards of Israeli newspapers.

At other posts some career ambassadors shy away from press contact themselves and even inhibit the USIA officers from responding to anti-American statements and misinformation in the media. This reluctance to deal with the media and to affirm publicly official U.S. positions on controversial issues means that an ambassador is not achieving his potential as a communicator of U.S. national policy. Restricting the USIA press people from aggressively defending U.S. positions makes it impossible for them to achieve their own potential. And yet, at several posts, for example, the embassy won't provide spokesmen or authorize USIA representatives to give the U.S. viewpoint on TV talk shows.

In general the public affairs and information officers are capable of producing effective press releases, but more often than not the releases actually produced do not deal with substantive matters. Most press releases from USIA missions are announcements of lectures, art shows, and so forth.

Of major assistance to USIA officers in the field is the Agency-prepared daily Wireless File of news which includes documentary texts of news conferences and speeches by top U.S. officials such as the President and Secretary of State, and significant articles appearing in the American press. USIA officers can then make excerpts from the daily file, which is received by radioteletype, and send them by messenger or mail to their media contacts. Wireless File items of special interest are also sent to key officials of the host government, to academic specialists, and other important contacts in the country. Having full texts available is of immense help in presenting the U.S. position abroad, because the public affairs officer or information officer can say, "Here is what the President actually said. Here is what Secretary Shultz or Secretary Weinberger actually said." Also the recipients of Wireless File items are very grateful for this service which is a great convenience and assistance to them in their work.

In Burma, which is in many ways a unique situation, because USIA is denied access to the press and the news is subjected to prior censorship, USIA conveys U.S. views to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and party leaders by sending the Wireless File to them by messenger daily. In Bonn, the Chancellor and Foreign Minister send drivers to pick up the File at the Embassy at 6:30 every morning.

USIA missions have the ability to provide services to foreign media people by nominating them for travel grants to the United States, by

arranging their attendance at regional conferences, by lining up interviews with visiting U.S. officials or personalities, and by calling on headquarters to assist foreign editors and correspondents travelling in the United States.

The effectiveness of the public affairs and information officers who deal with the media at USIA posts is determined by their ability to develop close and productive relationships built on mutual trust and candor. It also depends on hard work and creativity. In London, 2 or 3 days before the arrival of President Reagan in June 1982, the public affairs officer spent 2 hours briefing the research assistant to the BBC announcer designated as anchorman for the President's visit.

Entertaining key media people at lunch or dinner is another way to improve and maintain relationships, but the representation allowances for USIA officers are paltry considering today's high costs in most of the world's capitals. Last year the allowances were raised by a small amount; yet they remain grievously inadequate, and USIA officers abroad who wish to make a maximum effort must pay out of their own pockets significant sums each year in order to meet their business/social obligations.

American Participants Program (AMPARTS)

This program, which brings American speakers to foreign audiences, is managed at headquarters by political appointee Richard Bissell, an academician from the Foreign Policy Institute at the University of Pennsylvania. He has a staff of 84 employees, 50 of them being in professional positions. The program, costing $3 million this fiscal year, sent about 650 speakers abroad in 1982.

The speakers are selected for 3-week tours to at least three countries. USIA pays the transportation expense and a $75 per diem. There are also "partial AMPARTS," those speakers who are traveling abroad for another purpose and agree to make one or more appearances for USIA.

The headquarters of the AMPARTS program selects the speakers whose services are then "offered" to the field. If public affairs officers in three or more countries of a given region ask for a listed speaker, his travel and itinerary of appearances will be arranged in consultation between headquarters and the field.

Speakers are chosen for their expertise in such fields as foreign policy, U.S. government and politics, economics, social development, the arts and humanities, and science and technology. Public affairs officers may ask headquarters for speakers in other fields, perhaps energy policy, trade policy, urban planning or mass transit, because of a special interest in these fields at a government ministry or a university. Headquarters will try to accommodate such special requests but only if two other missions in the region are interested in the same expertise or if an appropriate "partial AMPARTS" is travelling in the region on other business.

According to Bissell, the speakers on foreign policy and arms control are generally from either the U.S. Government or from universities or think tanks in the Washington, D.C. area, while those speaking on economic and social issues may come from anywhere in the country. He justifies the predominance of foreign policy and arms

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control speakers from the Nation's Capital on the basis that they are more likely to be up to date on the administration's policies.

Field personnel of the Agency and foreign service officers are critical of the AMPARTS program, charging that many of the speakers offered are too junior and too mediocre to either attract a significant audience or to hold its attention if they get one. One public affairs officer told me that the AMPARTS money would be better spent on academic exchanges.

According to the same officer, 75 percent of the speakers offered are unknown and unwanted at his post. Bissell himself, as head of the program, acknowledges that 60 to 70 percent of the speakers offered are rejected by officers in the field who make their own suggestions. He said that the availability of senior-level speakers from government and the universities is less than that of more junior specialists, and that this is a reason why it is harder to obtain leaders and established experts for speaking tours.

A frequent complaint in the field is that the AMPARTS program under the Reagan administration has a selection bias favoring conservatives as against liberals. Bissell acknowledges this, saying that he is not seeking ideological balance. He said that "We have discovered the Hoover Institution."

One can argue, and many do, that political slanting of the selection process for AMPARTS is wrong headed and a perversion of a process meant to be strictly objective. One can also argue that during the Carter administration there was a great preponderance of liberal speakers with no suggestion then that there should be balance. Surely any administration will prefer to be represented by speakers who have some sympathy for its basic positions, and therefore liberal administrations can be expected to favor liberal speakers while conservative administrations can be expected to favor conservative speakers.

There is no question that AMPARTS provides a service to the field missions, acting—as Bissell says—as a catalyst between the embassy and elements of the local society. More than that, it is a service which the mission can provide to foreign nationals in ministries, academic institutions, and other organized groups. And it is a tool in the process of explaining the United States, the American experience, and U.S. policy to influence persons in the host country.

Ultimately, however, its effectiveness rests on the ability of AMPARTS managers to obtain speakers of a quality which both reflects excellence and increases respect for the United States.

Libraries

USIA maintains 122 libraries and 9 reading rooms in 79 countries. They are generally operated by exceptionally bright and dedicated local employees under the supervision of an American cultural officer. There are 13 American regional librarians (Abidjan, Monrovia, Nairobi, Johannesburg, Tunis, Brussels, Rome, Vienna, Islamabad, Jakarta, Panama City, Santo Domingo, and Montevideo) and only six American librarians posted to individual countries (Mexico, Brazil, West Germany, France, India and Japan).

Last summer a policy statement on libraries was issued to the field by USIA Director Charles Wick and Educational and Cultural Affairs Associate Director Ronald Trowbridge expressing concern over the decline in the number of USIA-operated libraries over the past 20 years, pledging to halt the decline and to upgrade the libraries. The statement made the broad comment that USIA "cannot be truly effective in serving our national security interests and foreign relations without a healthy and active library operation around the world." It announced a 5-year "enhancement" project for the library system.

USIA personnel overseas—both American and indigenous—are devoted to their libraries and to meeting the needs of their target audiences for books, magazine articles and documents. I was especially impressed by the intelligence and initiative of the locally hired librarians who seem determined both to serve and increase their clientele.

Their outreach programs, developed together with the cultural officers, are significant. In Burma, we do not have a library as such because foreign libraries are prohibited. However, the USIA mission circulates cases of books for borrowing to government ministries and university departments for 90-day periods, following which the books are contributed to Burmese libraries. In most nations, the USIA librarians mail weekly "alerts" to readers of English about significant articles in the U.S. press which can be ordered free of charge from the USIA library. In Tel Aviv, a book resource list is mailed periodically to the whole computerized list of contacts who can order specific books by telephone. In Budapest, where the numbers of people coming into the library are small because the library is on the premises of the Embassy, the librarian sends copies of the tables of contents from American periodicals to those on the mailing list who can then order individual articles.

Both American and local employees of USIA abroad have many complaints about headquarters support for the libraries. They talk of a cutback in art books, problems in obtaining the Sunday New York Times within a reasonable period, late arrival of requested documents such as Congressional hearing transcripts and Congressional committee reports, and an inadequate supply of videotapes from the Sunday network discussion programs. USIA in Israel receives almost no books in Hebrew and very few in Arabic. USIA in Greece receives no books in Greek.

The most commonly heard complaint in the field is that USIA headquarters under the current administration has sent to the libraries a disproportionate number of books reflecting the views of "arch" conservatives in politics and economics. While these books are sent unsolicited to the libraries, cultural officers and librarians do say that they can obtain whatever books they choose to order, regardless of ideological slant. A book much criticized in the field, although it came recommended from the Book Programs Division of the Office of Educational and Cultural Affairs, is "The New Right Papers," edited by Robert W. Whitaker and containing 12 essays by such activists of the right as William Rusher, Richard Viguerie and Paul Weyrich. Another is "Ethnic America" by Dr. Thomas Sowell of the Hoover Institution who makes the case against affirmative action. The "Book Alert" on this book states that it is "recommended for PAO and embassy staff use, as well as careful programming and presentation. . . . Use should, however, also take into account local sensitivities."

Generally the libraries maintain a core collection of books about the history of the United States, the democratic tradition, and the contemporary scene in the United States. There seems to be an emphasis on economics and international relations, while some public affairs officers indicated that they are seeking stronger collections on science and technology because of the demand for them.

The Office of Educational and Cultural Affairs makes books available to USIA posts for presentation to university and other local libraries. Under USIA auspices, such American books are translated into Arabic, French, Spanish, and Chinese and published commercially in Cairo, Paris, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, and Hong Kong or Taiwan. In addition, U.S. publishers donate tens of thousands of books annually to USIA posts in the developing countries, with USIA only paying the cost of shipment.

Educational and Cultural Exchanges

The Associate Director for Educational and Cultural Affairs, Ronald Trowbridge, told me that the Soviet Union is spending $250–$275 million a year for exchanges, while the United States budget for this activity is now about $92 million. We know also that France and the Federal Republic of Germany are spending significantly more than the United States for these activities. France may be spending as much as four times what we are spending, and Germany about twice as much as we are spending.

Among USIA field personnel, there is the strong feeling that the educational and cultural exchanges have more long-range advantage to the United States than any other activity. They note the names of leaders in each country whose first exposure to the United States was as a Fulbright grantee or "international visitor." They speak of their best contacts and closest friends in host governments, universities and the media whose interest in—and understanding of—the United States grew out of a visit to our country under a USIA-managed program. The Fulbright program alone has brought about 85,000 foreign professors, researchers, teachers and students to the United States since it began in 1949. (About 48,000 U.S. citizens have gone abroad under the program.)

I believe that this favorable attitude toward exchanges is the predominant attitude by far. Nevertheless, there are some who believe that the Fulbright program should be used even more directly to "promote foreign relations." Trowbridge said he would "rather send a teacher than a researcher." And the deputy chief of mission of a U.S. Embassy in Europe told me that he thinks educational exchanges are "often" on subjects "of little value to the U.S. Government."

The cultural officers and their often gifted local employees at USIA posts do an excellent job in counseling students interested in studying in the United States. Tens of thousands of such students come into the USIA missions every year; in Tel Aviv alone, about 3,000 students are counseled annually, of whom perhaps 600 go to the United States to study for the first time.

As regards international visitor grants for young foreign leaders to make short-term visits to the United States to learn about American government, institutions and society, a cultural affairs officer in Europe said that it is "the most effective program we have because there's

nothing like letting them see the United States at first hand." Certainly the history of the program indicates that the field has done a good job in identifying the "comers" in foreign societies and giving them this opportunity for exposure to the United States. Nevertheless, one deputy chief of mission at a U.S. Embassy said that the "real" comers in the country to which he is assigned are too busy to go on such tours and therefore "second raters" are frequently sent. While *some* of the most important people cannot make the trips, young leaders of significant talent and promise are generally available for these tours from which both they—and the United States—benefit.

The procedure at the American Embassy in Tel Aviv is illustrative. Twenty-four persons last year received international visitor program grants of $6,000 each for 30-day trips. The cultural affairs officer chairs the country team which selects the participants, with the ambassador as the final reviewer. Among the grantees this year were four members of the Knesset, the information director of the Likud Party, a political writer of a major daily newspaper, the director of the Arabic Service on Radio Israel, and a number of researchers in various fields from institutes and universities.

The USIA branch in Jerusalem had nine such travel grants last year and selected, among others, the president of the new university in Hebron, the director of a non-PLO Palestinian press service, a labor conciliator and the head of a training institute.

Of all the posts, USIA Brazil sends the largest numbers of international visitors to the United States. Although almost 55 were sent last year, the public affairs officer thinks it would be worthwhile to send even more.

Under the international visitors and related programs, USIA has sought since the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in 1979 to encourage normalization of relations between the peoples of those two nations. Special funds were allocated to enable Israelis, Egyptians and other Arabs to attend regional conferences under USIA auspices. Egyptians, Israelis and others have been invited to participate at the Salzburg Seminar, and institutions have been subsidized in part to help bring Israelis and Arabs together at meetings and conferences.

Distribution and Records System (DRS)

The Distribution and Records System is a computerized compilation for the management of embassy and USIA contacts. It facilities record keeping and the availability of mailing lists of all kinds. It is especially useful as an ongoing "institutional memory" of contacts and friends which might well be lost as foreign service officers and foreign service information officers transfer in and out so frequently.

Ideally the Embassy and the USIA mission would unify records of their contacts on DRS, but in many cases Embassy officers have refused this, saying sometimes that they want to keep their contacts private and unknown to the local employees who operate DRS. Other times they say that they suspect that the breadth or volume of their contacts might some day be evaluated by others since the DRS provides this capability.

Most USIA officers with whom I have discussed DRS consider it an excellent tool for record keeping on contacts and for expediting mailings to specialized groups. On average the DRS at a USIA post will have about 5,000 contacts "on file."

Foreign Employees

The locally hired employees of USIA missions abroad, who are foreign nationals, have long had the unstinting admiration of the American USIA staffs. They perform important professional, administrative and clerical functions, and in most posts they have provided necessary continuity and institutional memory as American personnel have come and gone on 3–4 year tours. They "know the territory" and serve as constant advisers to the American personnel on adapting to the local scene, dealing with the local media, making appropriate contacts, and doing business in a way that accommodates local sensitivities. They are a continuing source of useful ideas for the operation of the mission.

Many foreign national employees have served the USIA missions for as long as 30 years and are approaching retirement. To replace them in some cases is very difficult because their experience at the missions is unique. For public affairs officers, this creates the dilemma of promoting others from within or bringing in qualified and promising new employees. In some countries, it was easier to attract outstanding people in the fifties and sixties than it is now, since development of the local economies in recent years has given superior people more competitive opportunities. Moreover, in certain countries, it was more prestigious in the immediate post-war years to work for Americans.

Some of the senior foreign national employees complain that their peers have fared better "on the outside" in the last 10 years in terms of pay, benefits and retirement plans, due to restricted upward mobility at the missions in a time of Agency cutbacks. One such employee said to me, "I reached the top of my possibilities at the age of 48 and it was too late to get out although the outside now pays much better and has better benefits." Whereas the salaries offered by USIA 20 and 30 years ago were better than local salaries for comparable work, that situation no longer obtains.

This has dampened the morale of many local employees, and their situation was worsened when—in the Carter administration—a new classification system was introduced to correct what headquarters saw as "overgrading." As a result, many positions were downgraded, leaving employees in their fifties with less pay despite inflation. Foreign national employees told me repeatedly that they have felt great loyalty to individual public affairs officers who have treated them fairly and with respect, but that headquarters neglects them.

A telegram to all posts in October 1980 blamed the downgradings on the posts for allegedly having promoted employees beyond the realistic grade levels of their jobs. "Posts," it said, "should recognize that FSN (Foreign Service National) positions are graded by duties and responsibilities of position, not performance of incumbent of position. Outstanding performance does not necessarily mean that the level of duties and responsibilities of a position has increased."

That inevitably cast a pall on the morale of the employees and, although many public affairs officers sought to mediate, and some obtained delays, the new system was carried out. A respected foreign employee who had been downgraded told me rather poignantly that "Universal rules and regulations don't accommodate local conditions."

The current administration is now completing the reclassification of positions while frankly acknowledging that the foreign national employees feel less secure than in the past. To ameliorate the morale problem, USIA has encouraged public affairs officers to nominate more foreign nationals for meritorious cash awards, and the foreign nationals are now receiving their fair share of such awards. Moreover, the State Department is studying proposals to improve benefits for foreign nationals serving in U.S. official establishments overseas, including USIA missions.

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